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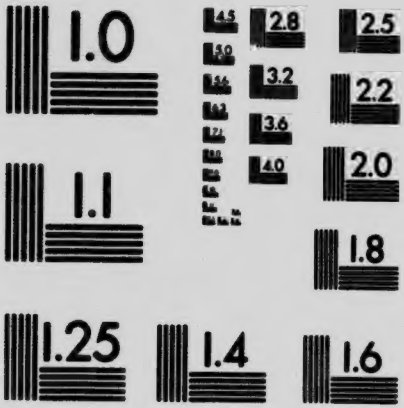

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PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 2

ARE WE WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

BY

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

GREAT BRITAIN is engaged in a war from which, as we believe, there was offered to our nation no honourable way of escape. The desire of all who love their country is to serve it in the hour of its need, and so to live and labour that those who have fallen in its service may not have died in vain. While this may suffice to make immediate duty clear, the war remains in the deepest sense a challenge to Christian thought. The present bitter struggle between nations which for centuri have borne the Christian name indicates some deep-seat failure to understand the principles of Christ and to ap them to human affairs.

This series of papers embodies an attempt to reach, by common thought, discussion and prayer, a truer understanding of the meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church to the individual, to society and to the world.

Those who are promoting the issue of these papers are drawn from different political parties and different Christian bodies. They believe that the truth they seek can be attained only by providing for a measure of diversity in expression. Therefore they do not accept responsibility for the opinions of any paper taken alone. But in spirit they are united, for they are one in the conviction that in Christ and in His Gospel lies the hope of redemption and health for society and for national life.

ARE WE WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

One of the deepest questions which this war raises for us as a people is: Have we still a mission in the world? Are we worth fighting for? Is it worth while to preserve the independence and integrity of these islands and of the British Empire? Those who have been dominating German thought upon world-problems affect to believe, and have not hesitated to preach, that we are a decadent people. According to these men, our day is done, our vitality is exhausted, and it is inevitable that, in the process of history, we should sink into an inferior place in the hierarchy of the nations. Is there any truth in this? Is there any danger that such a thing may happen? If there is, how are we to prevent it?

I

Modern Germany presents to us the spectacle of a nation which has ordered its life, for a generation and more, in accordance with a definite conception of its purpose and its future. It has done so with great and unremitting thoroughness. It has organized its education, its industrial and social politics, with a steady and unrelaxing eye upon the great destiny that it was to carve out for itself in the world. Certain social reforms that we in this country have been achieving only very

slowly, and with varying success, have become commonplaces of German life. In dealing with problems of national insurance, the relief of poverty, unemployment, and the like, other nations have for a long time been borrowing from the experience of Germany. We are all well aware of the extraordinary enterprise of German industry. In many other directions evidence might be given to show how steadfastly, and with what utter disregard of personal and private interests, the leading minds of Germany have pursued the ideal of German greatness, and have imposed their notions upon the life of the nation.[1]

This does not mean that Germany has become an earthly paradise for its people. The very nature of its ideal involves a contempt for the individual which has had disastrous consequences in more than one way. Moreover, the process of social improvement is still very far from being completed, and the domination of a military caste has lessened many of the benefits that otherwise might have accrued from so careful an ordering of the social system. But when we have allowed for all this we still see the over-mastering desire to make Germany, in the interests of a great national purpose, as perfect, as healthy, as strong as possible in its inner life.

[1] All this makes a far more wonderful story than the present condensed statement can even suggest. It should be read in Price Collier's *Germany and the Germans*, or Charles Tower's *Germany of To-day*.

ARE WE WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

II

Lord Rosebery, in the course of the Boer War, made an historic remark to the effect that we should 'muddle through'. It is characteristic of our national temper that when the extraordinary efficiency of our naval and military organization was revealed to us at the beginning of this war, we all gasped with gratified astonishment. We could hardly believe it. A cynical psychologist might be tempted to describe the British as a nation with a genius for muddling through. Most of us have again and again, as we have looked back upon the last few years, been irritated and perplexed by our ever-recurring muddles. We have had the Education muddle, the Commercial muddle, the Labour muddle, and a host of other lesser muddles; we have ever with us our extraordinary religious muddle; and we came to a climax in the Irish muddle. The outsider looking upon us might perhaps be justified in thinking that this seeming disintegration was a sign of national exhaustion. It is not improbable that the Prussian militarist party based some of their calculations upon this supposition. They were misled. Beneath the seeming confusion our national unity lay secure after all.

This confusion has its roots in several circumstances. But it may with no little plausibility be urged that it arises chiefly from the dearest and most cherished of all our possessions—our liberty. This is not the place to describe the growth in England of liberty, civil and religious, of the constitutional monarchy and of demo-

cracy. It is the result of that long process that the love of liberty has become at last bred in our bones. Our heroes are men who laid down their lives for our liberties, the Hampdens, the Covenanters, and the rest. Sometimes we have forgotten our ideal, and have had to recover it through sharp and unmistakable misfortune, as through the loss of the North American colonies. Yet here it is to-day, deep down in us all, this love of liberty. It is the one thing that has made compulsory military service impossible hitherto in this country. We hate all kinds of compulsion. This hatred makes us resent all official intrusions into our private lives, all interference with our personal concerns. It is this that has given the doctrine of property the quite exaggerated sanctity that it has amongst us. And it is this that has secured the spaciousness of our lives, preserving among us the possibility of spontaneity and individuality, in contrast with the rigours and the flattening effects of the stern civil discipline that prevails in many other countries. It is very largely our loyalty to the ideal of liberty that does from time to time involve us in some of our seemingly inextricable muddles. For so dearly do we cherish our personal liberty that we tend to assert it at the expense of the liberty of other people, and are sometimes unprepared to have it limited in the interests of the welfare of the nation. That is to cherish our liberty not wisely but too well. Under these conditions, liberty sometimes becomes its own worst enemy.

Liberty does not mean the absence of restrictions.

One cannot escape from restrictions in this world. Social life would be impossible unless we were prepared to exercise individual self-limitations of some kind. Liberty is the power to choose under what restrictions we shall live, and the willing acceptance of restrictions is one of the privileges of the free man. He ceases to be free when he is compelled to accept them. We have yet to learn the meaning of liberty unless we realize that it contains the duty of willing self-restriction in its own interests, as well as in the interests of a higher good. Up to a certain point we already act upon this principle. We enjoy a liberty qualified by our necessary police institutions. We do it for our own comfort. We know there would be less liberty if we did not. But we need to carry this principle a great deal further, in order to achieve the spirit in which we shall be prepared willingly to submit to any restriction that the welfare of the State may call for, provided, of course, that such restrictions do not interfere with the rights of conscience. Any restrictions which do so interfere cannot in the long run be good for the State, and they must therefore be withstood. But short of that, the greatness and the unity of a people depend upon their willingness to subordinate their personal rights to the interests of the whole.

A great deal of our trouble in England, whether in politics, in industry, or in our social order, arises from a lack of agreement to do this. We have been too persistent in our individualism and our class prejudices; we have been too self-confident and assertive in our

partisanships; and we must plead guilty to the charge of grinding our own axes too exclusively. We have considered public measures too often from the point of view of their effect upon our own personal or family or class or commercial prospects. We have not been interested in our municipalities. We have not troubled to vote at elections. We have forgotten and forsaken England in our preoccupation with our own personal or class concerns.

To-day, under the stress of a common danger, we have recovered our unity and our solidarity. But the war will not last for ever. When the war is over, are we going to relapse again into the bad old divisive and individualist ways? Are we going to lose our new-found comradeship? In the special circumstances of this hour we have willingly accepted many embarrassing restrictions. In a dozen ways we have gladly put up with discomforts and limitations. We are rightly proud of our present solidarity. Are we going to throw it all away when the war is over?

It is surely far too good a thing to be sacrificed. How then can it be saved? Only by the recovery of an ideal of Britain's greatness and purpose in the world that will command our allegiance and that will make us, for the love we bear our country, her eager slaves, rejoicing in the subordination of our own personal interests to her glory and her mission in the world. It is the absence of such a compelling ideal that has imperilled the unity of our national life in recent years. Our future depends upon our recovering and preserving our solidarity through the discovery of the real purpose to which God has called us.

III

Perhaps it will help us to a clearer view of what England's mission is if we inquire what Germany conceived its own destiny to be, and how it was setting out to realize it.

The root of it all lay in the unquestioned conviction of the intellectual and moral supremacy of the Teuton. This has been assiduously propagated and spread in Germany for many years. It would be a mistake to suppose that German aggressiveness started in a worship of might. On the contrary, it has its spring in a profound belief in the Germanic type of culture, a belief so profound that it has led to the conviction that 'the greatness and the good of the world is the predominance there of German culture, of the German mind, in a word, of the German character'. 'The triumph of the Empire' (I quote from the late Professor Cramb) 'will be the triumph of German culture, of the German world-vision in all the phases and departments of human life and energy, in religion, poetry, science, art, politics and social endeavour.'

That Nietzsche expressed a profound contempt for the German ideal did not prevent his teaching from dominating the minds that have ruled modern Germany. Nietzsche preached the doctrine of the super-man: Germany translated this into the doctrine of the supernation. And just as the super-man achieved his supremacy by exercising the 'will to power', so the supernation is to establish itself by the assertion of its power.

Germany must therefore first of all become the premier world power, brushing all possible rivals out of the way in the process; then it can impose German culture upon the world.

Germany's first duty, then, was to become powerful. The cultivation of might became a moral obligation. Might became synonymous with right, and naturally war came to be conceived of as 'an ordinance set by God'. 'It is', says Treitschke, 'political idealism that demands war.' The natural and inevitable consequence of the ideas underlying German polity is the glorification of war, and the elevation of preparations for war into the primary concern of the State.

We can now see the consequences of this doctrine. We see it in the extraordinary preparations which have been made for war. We see it in the lack of scruple that has characterized the German attitude to Belgian neutrality, and in the cynicism which would brush aside a treaty as a scrap of paper, in the ruthlessness that has laid Belgium waste, in the contempt for human life with which the German campaign has been pushed forward, in that concrete negation of all true culture which is responsible for the ruins of Louvain, Malines, and Rheims. German culture has become a byword and a laughing-stock among those who are ignorant of its splendid past, and a nation has been plunged into one of the greatest crimes in history.

IV

The German ideal stands discredited. What then is England's ideal to be ?

Consider for a moment that astonishing fact called the British Empire. There is in the history of British imperial expansion a great deal that does not bear very close scrutiny. It would be sheer hypocrisy to assert that all the makers of the British Empire have always had clean hands, though they were probably no worse in that respect than their competitors. But the really significant fact in this connection is the way in which Britain *has held her empire together*. It is not a vast agglomeration of territory held together by military terrorism. It is a sisterhood of free self-governing commonwealths. The grant of self-government to the South African colonies is a recent instance of the characteristic British method of imperial consolidation. The policy has been that of trusting the people in annexed territories, giving them the liberties of the homeland and equal status of citizenship within the Empire. That is to say, the British policy has been to unite its component parts in a family bond, and to make the stranger free of the children's home. And the justification of that policy is seen to-day. It had been the calculation of some that under the pressure of war the Empire would fall to pieces. What we are looking upon is the wonderful spectacle of the free peoples of the British commonwealths beyond the seas rallying with one accord to the aid of the mother-

land. The energy of cohesion in the British Empire is a moral bond, and mere physical force can never disintegrate it. No howitzers can destroy those foundations of sentiment upon which the Empire rests. Moral sentiment is the mightiest thing in the world.

Consider the still stranger case of India. Our colonies are peopled mostly by our own flesh and blood, and by races of European origin. But India contains three hundred millions of people of a different colour, including many nations and many tongues. We have made many mistakes in India, and there is not a little that is contemptible in the story of our relations with the Indian people. Yet we hold India to-day. By what? By military power? The white military force in India does not, as a matter of fact, amount to a respectable police force. India is not held by military terrorism. India is bound to England by its recognition of British justice, by the evenhandedness of British policy, by the realization of a liberty and a prosperity which would have been impossible save only as the British *raj* has imposed its own ideals upon the government of the country. And the result? We are seeing it to-day. All parts of India are vying with one another in sending the help that Britain needs in its hour of danger. Here again is revealed the sovereign power of the moral bond.

What the colonial and imperial record of Britain proves is that its chief and most stable triumphs have been achieved in the region of morals. The story of British arms, with all its great and notable heroisms,

contains no adventure comparable, either in its daring or in its vindication, to the trust in the efficacy and sufficiency of moral ideas in public policy. We shall not, in recording this fact, assume the Simon Pure attitude. Let us remind ourselves that Britain has again and again back-slidden from this faith, and that its apostasies have been visited with grievous humiliation. Both by its successes and by its failures it has proved the validity of moral principles in the business of government.[1]

Of these moral principles we may say that two stand out. The first is the preservation of a strict integrity, and faithfulness to covenants. The second is the virtue of trusting other people. The British Empire rests upon the twin potencies of *trustworthiness* and *trustfulness*. And here we find not only the ground of the success of British policy, but also the ground of British liberty. Injustice and suspicion are destroyers of liberty. Where these are there cannot be liberty. The British constitution rests upon faith in the people; its stability depends upon the continued trust of the people in it. Let the State begin to distrust the people, or the people to suspect the State, and there is an end of liberty. Within the

[1] It is no doubt true that a formidable case against this view of the British record might be made out by massing together all the facts of our history that are a reproach to us. But on a fair interpretation of the general trend of our history, the view stated here must stand; and in any case it is true that if our history *throughout* does not teach us to believe in the validity of moral principles in national policy, it is our own fault. We have tried it both ways; and we have ample grounds for holding this faith.

British Empire there is liberty and peace to-day because of the consolidating and emancipating power of such moral ideas as these.

Even in the European record of Great Britain there has been a certain consistency of respect for, and appeal to, moral principles. There is much in the history of our relations with the Continent which is not to be justified. Yet, though that be allowed, we may claim that there has been a general insistence upon those moral sanctions without which it is impossible to create and to preserve goodwill among nations. Without such goodwill there can never be a stable civilization. And it is always to be remembered that our inner struggle for liberty has been the inspiration and guide of many other nations in their endeavour after the same good. It is recorded in connection with the modern advance of Russia towards constitutionalism that 'the political ideals both of cadets and octobrists were learnt chiefly from England, the study of whose constitutional history has aroused in Russia an enthusiasm hardly intelligible to a present-day Englishman'. In the three first *Dumas* 'England supplied the staple of precedents and parallels for quotation'.[1]

Out of all this emerges one plain fact: Great Britain is charged with the obligations of a great tradition. Within its own borders and its empire it has achieved liberty; and with liberty, domestic peace. It is its splendid mission to pass on this gift to the world. The ideal that is

[1] *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. xii, p. 379.

implicit in its history is that of 'a world set free'. It makes no boast of a culture which it would impose upon the world for its good; it is simply vested with a gift in trust for the world. But the conditions of this gift are inviolate trustworthiness and adventurous trustfulness in public policy. It is the vocation of Britain to proclaim and practise the faith that in the supremacy of moral ideas lies the promise of the liberty and the peace of the world.

A world set free—here is our calling and our mission. But it is well that we should remember that liberty is not an end, but a means. It is the condition of personal and national self-realization. It is a step on the way to a larger and more splendid goal. There is that which is greater than England, nobler than the Empire. It is the Kingdom of God. Into this Kingdom the nations of the world are to pour their glory. Freed from suspicion and hate of one another, they will set about the task of cultivating their peculiar genius, and they will bring their wealth of thought and knowledge, their harvest of art and love as tribute to the Kingdom of God, which is also the Kingdom of Man. It is given to us to share in the splendid enterprise of paving the way for this greater Kingdom by teaching the world such things as we ourselves have been enabled to learn, especially the truth that liberty and peace are begotten of integrity, justice, and mutual trust. This is our national share in that wide co-operation by which the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

But it may be said to us, 'Physician, heal thyself'. We admit with shame and penitence that there are things in our midst which dishonour the Son of Man. Our slums, our social confusion, our divisiveness in Church and State, such things as these must be done away. The first business of our new-found comradeship is to heal the ancient diseases of our own commonwealth. But one thing is yet lacking to us. Justice and integrity Britain respects. She has learnt the magic of trustfulness. There yet remains to be sought a great baptism of love. The comradeship of these latter days has been born of a sense of common danger; it will break up apace if it be not swiftly confirmed by the cement of love. We require that supreme gift which will cleanse us of all mutual suspicion and bitterness, whether between persons or parties, classes or churches; which will add to our passion for liberty the abiding grace of a fellowship in which we shall gladly accept limitations and subordinate personal interests to the common endeavour after a redeemed and redeeming motherland; and which will thrust us forth on the divine embassy of winning all the peoples into a world commonwealth of goodwill, freedom, and peace.